

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Reps. Pete Stark (D-CA) and Rush Holt (D-NJ) introduced legislation, the Realizing the Spirit of IDEA Act, to reform and strengthen special education in the nation's public schools. Their legislation would ensure mandatory funding for the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) and link increases in funding directly to student achievement.

"The Realizing the Spirit of IDEA Act will aggressively modernize special education programs by providing financial bonuses to schools that improve education for special education students," Holt said. "But, unlike other proposals, this funding will be guaranteed now – not ten years from now – because special education students should not have to wait any longer to receive the equal education they deserve."

According to national statistics, special education students lag far behind other students in passing state proficiency exams. Their drop out rate is almost double. Only 55% of students with disabilities receive a regular high school diploma. They are half as likely to attend college compared to their non-disabled counterparts.

"Our proposal recognizes that special education will never realize its full potential unless Congress makes good on its promise to make it work," Stark said. "We've never given schools the funding and incentives they need to boost student achievement. The result is that students with disabilities continue to be left behind. Our bill doesn't allow this to happen. It tells schools that if they can produce results, we'll produce the funding. It also says we'll stick by you in your efforts to help these children by mandating that the money you need is there year after year."

The Realizing the Spirit of IDEA Act would help children with disabilities by providing schools with the financial incentives to improve achievement among special education students. The level of mandatory federal spending a school is eligible for is linked directly to their ability to demonstrate improved outcomes on important measures including: attendance, graduation, drop out rates and post-secondary education and employment.

The Realizing the Spirit of IDEA Act has the support of numerous special education experts and child advocacy and mental health groups, including: the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and the National Association of School Psychologists.

According to Stark, "The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has opened the

doors of education to millions of children with disabilities. But, to truly realize the spirit of IDEA, it is essential that access to special education translates into better outcomes for these children. Reform is not about empty rhetoric. Reform means nothing less than better achievement for students with disabilities.”